WHATA MAN CAN BELIEVE
2. Jesus Christ Is Lord

John 10:22-39
July 31, 1966

I began last week the attempt to bring to a neat conclusion six years of work. Under the general heading "What a Man Can believe:" I suggested that a man today can believe in God. As I said then this final series of sermons is as much a looking inside my heart and mind as anything else; and hopefully one of the results will be that you will share my own questions--and that your thinking will be pushed along.

Is it odd that "Jesus Christ is Lord" should be included in this context? After all, that affirmation stands at the very basis of all theology--it is the fundamental Christian assertion; it is the theological common denominator between us and all other Christians, past and present. Isn/t it a bit redundant, then, to suggest that it is one of the things a man can believe? I think not. I think not because that affirmation is essentially two-sided. I can stand here and proclaim that Jesus Christ is sovereign that he reigns over all men and all nations. I can do that very nicely, I think, using the best and most sophisticated theologians as resources. I can quote scripture, poetry, books and cite examples ad infinitum. But somewhere along the line that affirmation has to have meaning to you as a person living here, doing the things you do. Somewhere along the line the theological assertion "Jesus Christ Is Lord" has to become "Jesus Christ is My Lord," and that means that we have to make a decision. I believe I have made my skepticism clear regarding the fervent evangelistic type of Chrsitianity that emphasizes personal decision at the expense of sound theology. And yet I have to temper my own skepticism with the obvious fact that the early disciples did not go to their deaths for a theological thesis. Quite obviously they did not go out into the towns and villages

selfless and sacrificial.

And so, much of what goes under the name of Christianity today is devoid of Christ. Keep him out and everybody is happy. Eliminate him and there is no reason to sacrifice--or to love--or to think about sin. Keep Jesus Christ out and ther's no reason why you and I, as churchmen, should feel responsible for anyone but ourselves. Keep him out and there's no real reason why the church should get itself into someting so unpleasant as the civil rights movement. The result-an easy going religiosity that soothes and comforts, a spirituall ritualism that disturbs and challenges no one, and consequently heals and redeems no one.

The historic claims about J.C. bother us deeply - can't understand why it's necessary to make so much. -so let's eliminate

The orthodox claim is that Jesus of Nazareth was God incarnate; that he was both God and man; that his coming was God himself dwelling with man; that his death was an act of God done for man; that his resurrection was the decisive cosmic defeat of death and the promise of salvation and life eternal for all men.

All things considered that is a rather remarkable list of conclusions especially about a man who was such an obvious failure. By anyone's standards his life didn't add up to very much. He never traveled 200 mi. away from his place of birth. For 30 yrs he lived as everyone else-he was a carpent4r. Then at 30 he began to act strangely, preaching that the kingdom of God was at hand, teaching that it's a better thing to love your neighbor than to keep the law, healing sick people , creating disturbances among the peasantry, making a nuisance of himself in the Temple and Synagogs. No one of importance believdd him--even his 12 friends never quite understood

or to the lonely Doctor in the jungle. It points to the church in the ghetto, or the suburb, to the millions upon millions of Christian men and women who are today dong the work of Jesus Christ. It points to all of this and says this is Jesus Christ--believe in him, because he is responsible for all of this.

Jesus' only defense was to point to what he was doing; and I am suggesting that the most meaningful way to understand him today is to look at that life--and the lives that have so obviously been influenced by him.

In these terms then the issue becomes crystal clear. If Jesus wasn't the Christ; if he was merely a good man who died for a losing cause; if he was no more than one of humanity's shining lights, a visionary with some good ideas about ethical behavior if this is all he was--then he was also a liar and a fraud. He was this and worse because he saw himself as the Christ--he just didn't heal--he forgave sins. He did more than teach--he promised people a new life, a life that goes on through eternity. He just didn't die, he deliberately walked into the jaws of death, and on the evening of his arrest he drew out in the passover meal, the lasting significance of his dying. ("This is my body, borken for you. This cup is the nw covenant in my blood.") If he was not the Christ, he was mad.

If he was not theChrist, his disciples must also share the terrible guilt for perpetrating this cruel hoax on humanity. They had time, after his death, to reflect and decide what they should do. To say that he was not the Christ is to say that they, one and all, either had the same halucination-or else they deliberately left the upper room to go out and deceive the world.

every earthly authority one reigns supreme. It means that no earthly domain is too large or too small to be called his. It means that Jesus Christ is Lord of Soviet Russia, and the U.S. and even Red China. It means he is the soveriegn authority in the halls of the U.N and the Senate and in the Dyer Town Hall. It means that he is Lord of the High School Class room and the West Side Ghetto, the steel mill and the kitchen. Whether it is acknowledged or not, to affirm it meas to believe that Jesus Christ is Lord of All.

Again, howevr, we find ourselves at the theological impasse where we began. For it costs nothing to say that--but to say it and means it is to acknowledge that he is Lord over that part of life with which I am most familiar--my own life. It is to say he is my Lord. ~~To say that and mean it is to~~ And that confessions involves me personally - it is to throw oneself wholeheartedly into battles which are now fought in his name. It is to acknowledge him as judge of all I do. It is to accept his love poured out on my behalf and to allow my life to become a new life because of it. It is to live as he would have me live. It is to love and serve and die if need be, rejoicing--because it is for him, and he is Lord--Lord of all, and my Lord.

What can a man believe? Everyman believes something-everyman fills the gap in his life with some ultimate. I would suggest that a man can believe that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Amen.